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ELIZABETH BENNET: A WOMAN OF HER TIME

Bianca Deon Rossato*

RESUMO: Este artigo analisa a composição das personagens Elizabeth Bennet, de *Orgulho e Preconceito* (1813), escrito por Jane Austen, e Lizzie Bennet, de *Os Diários de Lizzie Bennet*, um vlog veiculado no canal YouTube por Hank Green e Bernie Sue. O objetivo é observar como as relações humanas são construídas, portanto é necessário atentar para o contexto social de ambas as protagonistas, o que envolve essencialmente a posição das mulheres na sociedade. Para tanto, a fundamentação teórica se dará através dos estudos de Robert Miles (2013), Vivien Jones (2012) e Angela McRobbie (2009). Ao se verificar os contextos das protagonistas, pode-se afirmar que elas representam os dilemas das mulheres de seu tempo e, ao apresentar tais relações humanas, atraem fãs, estudiosos e teóricos ao seu universo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: estudos de adaptação; mulher na sociedade; *Orgulho e Preconceito*; *Os Diários de Lizzie Bennet*.

ABSTRACT: This article analyses the composition of the characters Elizabeth Bennet, from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), by Jane Austen, and Lizzie Bennet, from *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (2012-2013), a video blog series aired on YouTube by Hank Green and Bernie Sue. It aims at observing how human relationships are constructed, so it is necessary to verify elements of both protagonists' social contexts, which involve mainly women's position in society. In order to do that, the theoretical background will be based on the works of Robert Miles (2013), Vivien Jones (2012), and Angela McRobbie (2009). Observing both protagonists' contexts one can affirm that they emulate the dilemmas of women of their time and, in portraying such strong human relationships, attract many fans, scholars and theorists to their realm.

KEY-WORDS: adaptation studies; women in society; *Pride and Prejudice*; *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

1 INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Bennet, the protagonist of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), by the British authoress Jane Austen, has become an iconic figure not only in literary literature circles, but also among contemporary mass culture consumers. This character, who is 200 years old, is more alive than ever as hundreds of adaptations, derivatives – including fanfictions of various types –, and books inspired not only by the famous Regency plot, but mainly by her are published every year. Fiona Stafford, in the introduction to the Oxford edition of the classic novel argues that, for instance, “when film-makers turn to Jane Austen [...] they are generally concerned less with documenting early nineteenth-century society than with representing powerful human relationships in a manner likely to appeal at the box office” (2008, p. xviii). Entertainment business set aside, this article aims at contrasting the original protagonist with the one from *The Lizzy Bennet Diaries*, an American video blog series aired on YouTube from April, 2012 to March, 2013, produced by Hank Green and Bernie Sue. It is relevant to observe that this work does not aim at deciding which of the *Elizas* is a better, more elevated character, but rather at

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observing how powerful human relationships are developed by the characters and what their role in them is. In this sense, it is necessary to point out that each period in history approaches literary works of art with different perspectives as they suit the context of their era. Jane Austen's body of work is no exception: people in different epochs have approached her life and her work in the most peculiar ways, from the classic Regency plot to brain eaters.

One interesting example of how an individual tackles a part of history and “re-manufactures” it to their necessities comes from Austen's family, when her brother, Henry Austen, wrote the first text concerning the authoress's life entitled *A Bibliographical Notice of the Author* for the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* in 1818. In his words, beloved Miss Austen lived “a life of usefulness, literature and religion that [...] by any means [was] a life of event”. (HARMAN, 2009) The first complete biography was published by James Edward Austen-Leigh, Austen's nephew, the *Memoir of Jane Austen*, in 1870, which brought her visibility, and started the move from “a life of no event” to the cult of a “Divine Austen” (HARMAN, 2009). According to Claire Harman (2009), in 1890, Austen's “first professional biographer, the historian Goldwin Smith”, reported that “there was nothing in Austen to illuminate”. For the biographer, “there is no hidden meaning in her; no philosophy beneath the surface for profound scrutiny to bring to light; nothing calling in any way for elaborate interpretation” (SMITH *apud* HARMAN, 2009). A hundred years afterwards, it is possible to notice many researchers who investigate the nuances of both her life and her work, and the mysteries - especially due to the editing work her sister Cassandra did to her letters and the lack of a personal journal - still captivate great attention either from those who see in her a traditional modest writer or from those who see feminist traits in her outspoken letters.

When it comes to her work, opinions have also diverged throughout the last two hundred years. Sir Walter Scott, for instance, in an edition of his *Journal* in 1826, refers to Austen's talent as such: “that young lady had a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with” (*apud* BLOOM, 2008, p. 105). At that time, Austen's composition of characters was already noticed as unique, as we shall see later on; however, it has also generated comments on a so-called disinterest for “important” causes, such as social problems or “real” individual problems. In 1848, two decades after Sir Walter Scott, Charlotte Brönte, in a letter to George Lewes, exposes her opinion about *Pride and Prejudice*:

An accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face; a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country, no fresh air, no blue hill, no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses (*apud* BLOOM, 2008, p. 106).

Although Darcy declares his love to Elizabeth rather passionately in the outside, it seems Brönte, being a Romantic, still considers the plot and its characters aloof. Claire Harman (2009) synthesizes the controversial responses Austen received throughout the nineteenth century as follows:

In the mid nineteenth-century – heyday of the Victorian triple-decker novel – Austen's restrained Regency romances looked old-fashioned and irrelevant

and met with very mixed critical responses. G. H. Lewes was an ardent advocate, but Charlotte Brontë thought her second-rate; Macaulay compared her with Shakespeare and pressed for a public monument, while Thomas Carlyle reviled the novels as “dismal trash” and “dishwashings”. But by the end of the century, the journalist T.E. Keble announced that “all the reading world is now at Miss Austen’s feet” and a hundred years on, Austen is the only writer who is instantly recognizable by her first name (HARMAN, 2009, n.p.).

The great amount of opposing ideas concerning *Pride and Prejudice* reveal the complexity of the work, and applying any or one theory in specific may not be sufficient to tackle its richness. Additionally, the fact that Austen’s works have never been out of press certainly means that they communicate with the readers in different levels. Thus, in order to make an attempt at understanding the novel’s protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet and its homonymous protagonist from *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, this analysis focus on the historical period in which the novel was written to begin with. Concerning that, there are two important lines of thought to be taken into account. First, although it is a known fact that *Pride and Prejudice* is Austen’s “bright and light and sparkling” novel according to herself, and apparently does not dwell in any political situation¹, one cannot dismiss the fact that there are traits of revolutionary ideas in the composition of her characters. Secondly, so as to understand Elizabeth’s trajectory, it is necessary to observe the society to which she belongs. It is also rather relevant to observe the composition of Austen’s character in all of its facets, as it is going to be discussed later. As Robert Miles puts it, Austen is a master of characterization, “her capacity to create illusion of personality” has certainly been one of the reasons why she is still so popular (2013, p. 15). And, according to him, *Pride and Prejudice* is “particularly interesting in this regard, as it is the last novel for her first phase, the culmination of a twenty-year apprenticeship in the art of characterization” (MILES, 2013, p. 15).

2 HOW REVOLUTIONARY AUSTEN’S IDEAS ARE

What is the concept underneath the term ‘revolutionary’ which is to be dealt with here? It is specifically in this respect that theoreticians have argued both in and against Austen’s favour. Researchers of Jane Austen’s works keep wondering whether her protagonists are modern (with feminist traits) in the sense that they do not accept at first-hand the fates imposed on them, or if they are, in fact, traditional and conservative, because all of them end up marrying (which is the traditional standard for a lady in the nineteenth century England). Vivien Jones is one of the researchers who identifies such dissonant conceptions towards the British authoress’ body of work as she explains that “accepted by some commentators as unproblematically feminist because of its woman-centred concern with the politics of private life and sexual relationships, Austen’s fiction has been seen by others as deeply traditional in its attitude to gender roles” (JONES, 2012, p. 282).

It is quite clear, though, that such polarized approaches do not solve the question of how to understand Elizabeth Bennet as a woman of her time. In an attempt at better

¹ The only apparent allusion to the Napoleonic War, which took place exactly through the period Austen wrote most of her novels, is the constant presence of the militia.

debating the matter, it seems plausible to observe the most important discussions of the time considering the roles of women in society. On the one hand, one of the most prominent names in the pro-revolutionary discussions is Mary Wollstonecraft, whose book *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 1792, is a milestone in the pursuit of women's rights. She is one of the women writers whose ideas prompted discussions which developed into what is known since the late nineteenth century as 'feminism'. According to Vivien Jones, even though Austen would certainly not be familiar with the term "feminism", she was aware of "the concept of individual rights and, more specifically, 'the rights of women'". Such an idea was developed "by women writers sympathetic to the ideals of the French Revolution" among which is Wollstonecraft (JONES, 2012, p. 282).

On the other hand, there is the evangelical Hannah More who, in the words of conservative commentator Richard Polwhele, is "the embodiment of 'modest Virtue'" (POLWHELE 1798, p. 28, 30). According to Jones, Polwhele "depicts More as urging her followers, in a 'voice seraphic', to 'clai[m] a nation's praise by using their moral influence to instill the traditional values which will secure national stability and cohesion'" (2012, p. 287). More, then, centralizes the responsibility of the maintenance of the Burkean "established structures of church, state, and family on the woman" (JONES, 2012, p. 287). Nevertheless, it is rather relevant to observe that, even though from different perspectives, these two women writers – Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More – as well as Catherine Macaulay, Mary Hays, Mary Robinson, and Priscilla Wakefield, "put questions of women's education, female equality, and the role of the family at the centre of the ideological debates generated by the war" (JONES, 2012, p. 287) – debates which Austen was most certainly aware of and, as we shall see, influenced the crafting of her heroines, Elizabeth Bennet included.

Furthermore, Jane Austen certainly lived in an environment which favoured reading, since her father owned a library of five hundred books which she had access to. Both her brother Henry Austen in the *Bibliographical Notice of the Author* (1818) and her nephew James Austen-Leigh in *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1870) observe that her reading was extensive and comprised history and *belles lettres*. Linda Bree, in a study of the writer's literary context, observes that Austen's "letters refer to many hours spent in reading and discussing sermons and travel-writing and books concerned with matters of contemporary religious and political interest" (2013, p. 56). Based on such observations one cannot refute the fact that Jane Austen was aware of the historical events which had occurred since the French Revolution in 1789, and which led to the war with England and brought great anxiety to the British society in those two decades – 1790s and 1800s. Such instability favoured the flourishing of opposing ideologies, including those concerning the roles of women in society. In addition to that, it is necessary to observe that Austen's family, as Vivien Jones puts it, "certainly [...] were not just patriots, but Tories" (2012, p. 288). In this sense, "they identified with the political grouping which defended the institutions that mattered to their family – the Church of England, the Navy, and a stable, essentially hierarchical social order" (JONES, 2012, p. 288). At the same time, as members of the professional class, "the Austens were strong defenders of merit, rather than mere birth, as the means to worldly success and personal happiness" (JONES, 2012, p. 288). When it comes to Jane Austen, "this broad political position is necessarily inflected by gender" (JONES, 2012, p. 288).

Yet another crucial piece of information from Austen's context refers to Enlightenment ideas, a philosophical movement which, in Brian Southam's words, is

“the sceptical movement of the eighteenth century which came to a climax in the French Revolution” (1987, p. 29). Such relation between Enlightenment and Austen is pointed out by the socialist and feminist Rebecca West to whom “it is surely not a coincidence that a country gentlewoman should sit down and put the institutions of society regarding women through the most gruelling criticism they have ever received” (*apud* SOUTHAM, 1987, p. 295). The key idea concerning such connection refers to the conception of every human individual being a rational creature which, according to Vivien Jones, can be found in “countless eighteenth century sermons” (2012, p. 283).

The most evident presence of Enlightenment ideas in *Pride and Prejudice* is centred in the way Elizabeth Bennet refuses Mr Collins marriage proposal: “Do not consider me now as an *elegant female* intending to plague you, but as a *rational creature* speaking the truth from her heart” (*PP*, p. 109)². Elizabeth, one might say, opposes Hannah More’s position for women - one in which they are supposed to maintain England’s tradition based on family structure and, therefore, marriage - to Mary Wollstonecraft’s defence of women’s rationality, a position in which women are capable of reaching important decisions on their own and as it better suits them. When Charlotte tells Elizabeth the news that she is marrying Mr Collins, she says:

‘I see what you are feeling’, replied Charlotte, - ‘you must be surprised, very much surprised, - so lately as Mr Collins was wishing to marry you. But when you have had the time to think it all over, I hope you will be satisfied with what I have done. I am not romantic, you know. I never was.’ (*PP*, p. 87).

When Charlotte says she is not a romantic, one might assume Elizabeth is, as she had already turned Mr Collins down for not loving or admiring him. While the former decides to marry, not only to conform to tradition, but also to secure her future, the latter was so surprised “as to overcome at first the bounds of decorum” as she cried out: “Engaged to Mr Collins! My Dear Charlotte, - impossible!” (*PP*, p. 86). In this perspective, Charlotte would be the rational creature defended by the Enlightenment thinkers, if only she did not decide to marry due to societal constraints imposed on the women of her time. That is where Elizabeth’s ideas appear as focused on the individual human being as a rational creature: “She [Elizabeth] had always felt that Charlotte’s opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she could not have supposed it possible that when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage.” (*PP*, p. 87) That is also her position when Mr Darcy proposes to her for the first time. No social elevation or money in the world would make her marry the man who, in her words, ruined her sister’s happiness forever. This contrast between Elizabeth’s and Charlotte’s points of view towards marriage represents a moment of transition of concepts concerning matrimony. Katherine Green draws from historians such as Lawrence Stone, Randolph Trumbach, and John R. Gills, when they argue that new conceptions of the individual rights started to rise in the eighteenth century at the same time as “a new conception of the spousal relationship, a shift from marriage based on parental arrangement and familial convenience to marriage based on an affective relationship between husband and wife” gained space (1991, p. 1).

² *Pride and Prejudice* will be referred to hence by its initials (*PP*).

3 *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*: A REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN'S POSITION IN ENGLAND'S REGENCY SOCIETY

Surrounded by such environment and ideas, Austen composed her oeuvre in the time span between 1792 and 1817. According to David Spring, some theorists “have had trouble in agreeing on what to call “the three or four families in which the British authoress crafted her novels” (2009, p. 45). Among other definitions for her scope of analysis, throughout more than a century and a half of investigation, it has been called “middle class”, “ordinary and middle life”; or she was named “the aristocracy’s annalist, or more commonly the gentry’s”; and finally a “bourgeois Jane Austen”. Spring tried to define what social class - even though the term was not in use then - Elizabeth Bennet pertains to and his conclusion is that she is part of a segment of the “modest rural gentry” which was a layer of society whose estates “in covering England in their thousands, managed to supply their owners with comfort and status sufficient to make them natural leaders of their local communities” (2009, p. 45). Elizabeth’s family seems to belong, then, to a group of such rank, which could be designed as “smaller-incomed gentry”, once they do not lead their community however much Mrs Bennet pretends to do so. In her eyes, as part of the less financially advantaged group from the gentry, the family cannot spare a chance of marrying one of their five daughters. Also, despite being a period of ongoing changes in thought, the protagonist’s England still maintains the law of entail, due to which ladies do not inherit land and property. Mr Collins, the distant cousin, is to inherit Longbourn and that is certainly why marrying him is more than advantageous in Mrs Bennet’s opinion. Even Darcy’s proposal, despicable as he may seem at the moment of his first proposal, is an advantageous choice for Elizabeth, although she refuses him as well.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh, although a conservative aristocrat, also exemplifies the process of change in point of view at that time when she says the law of entail was not felt necessary in Sir Lewis de Bourgh’s family, in a reference to the entail of Longbourn: “Your father’s estate is entailed to Mr Collins, I think. For your sake”, turning to Charlotte, “I am glad of it; but otherwise I see no occasion for entailing estates from the female line. It was not thought necessary in Sir Lewis de Bourgh’s family.” (*PP*, p. 112). Even though she is a very strict woman when it comes to social rank, as it is later observed when she pays a visit to Elizabeth and demands the young girl of “inferior birth” promises not to accept Mr Darcy’s proposal, she also demonstrates what could be considered feminist traits when she defends property should pass on to female heirs. How much of this are really de Bourgh’s feelings or Austen’s manoeuvre into speaking her mind through the character still needs to be further and more fully observed.

Nevertheless, Elizabeth’s dislike towards aristocracy is evidently represented by her courage when she first visits Rosings Park, Lady Catherine de Bourgh’s estate. While the rest of the party – Mr and Mrs Collins, Mr Lucas and Mary Lucas – is either mesmerized or frightened by the grandeur of the place and the authoritative manner of Lady de Bourgh, Lizzie does not seem very impressed and responds to the Lady’s questions at ease. When inquired on the accomplishments of hers and her sisters, she is not intimidated to state that none of them draw, only one of them plays and sings and all of them are out in society even though the eldest ones are not yet married. With such an expression of independence and self-assurance, she maintains the conversation and, at

the same time, reveals to the reader her disinterest in the accomplishments commonly required of a young lady in her marriageable years.

The profusion of human interactions attracts the readers as they seek to find out what such a spirited young lady will decide for her life, how she will react, and whether she will end up married. Robert Miles observes that Austen's use of characterisation encompasses all of the definitions for "character", that is "an orthographic letter, a reference, moral standing, bent of mind, personality, or appearance". There is, in his words, a complexity in the building of them to such an extent one must not take for granted the choices of words she makes (2013, p. 15). "Mind", for instance, is not merely a synonym for character. Miles observes "it was the philosopher Gilbert Ryle who first drew attention to the significance of 'mind' in Austen" (2013, p. 15). In Ryle's conception, Austen's use of the word is "peculiarly modern, albeit deriving, ultimately, from the seventeenth-century English moralist, the Earl of Shaftesbury" (2013, p. 15). The Earl on his turn reformulated the Socratic idea of 'know thyself' as 'divide yourself'. According to Miles, "such self-division is private, and inward: one revolves back into oneself, dividing the self into two parties, with one gaining the ascendancy over the other" (2013, p. 15). This is a process rather than a product, which Shaftesbury nominates 'soliloquy': "we know ourselves only to the extent that we keep this disciplined soliloquy going" (2013, p. 15). In this sense, "any moment of self-understanding must therefore be partial and provisional" (2013, p. 16).

Basing the discussion on such perspective, it is possible to affirm that beneath the cover of a young lady in her "marriageable years" - as John Bennet terms this period in a woman's life -, there is an individual creature that is facing life dilemmas and is lost (*apud* GREEN, 1991, p.11). She believes she knows herself and the others and demonstrates pride for it. Because of Darcy's behaviour at the first assembly, Elizabeth reinforces her own opinion concerning the aristocracy, what she fully explains when she refuses Darcy's first marriage proposal:

From the very beginning - from the first moment, I may almost say - of my acquaintance with you, your manners, impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form the groundwork of disapprobation on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike; and I had not known you a month before I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry (*PP*, p. 131-132).

She is only able to question her own perceptions concerning Darcy and the aristocracy when she visits Pemberley and listens to Mrs Reynolds refer to him affectionately when Mr Gardiner asks her whether he would marry: "Yes, sir; but I do not know when THAT will be. I do not know who is good enough for him". Or "I have never known a cross word from him in my life, and I have known him ever since he was four years old" (*PP*, p. 165). Of course seeing the grounds of Pemberley also has an important effect on the slow change the protagonist goes through from hating to loving Mr Darcy. In this sense, the impositions of the external world help her divide herself into what she thought she knew as the truth and what she learns to be the truth. The beginning for this process of change is when she repeatedly reads Darcy's letter explaining his driving Mr Bingley away from Jane and his relationship with George Wickham. And, as she learns to become a better person, so Darcy starts to understand and respect her family, and also learns to be less circumspect. In a macro perspective, David Monaghan (2009, p. 5) points out that "in spite of his reservations about her

background, Darcy makes many attempts to approach Elizabeth”. Nevertheless, as it has been exposed, “each time, Elizabeth rejects him. This creates an extremely frustrating situation and it is one that cannot be resolved until each has come to a better understanding of the other’s social group” (2009, p. 57). The matter of merit seems appropriate to be brought forward at this point in the discussions. Alongside Elizabeth’s processes of self-dividing in order to better understand the situations which surround her, is the fact that when she learns of Darcy’s context through his letter, and afterwards when he is the person responsible for restoring the honour of her family in the case of Lydia’s elopement, the reader observes that the gentleman, now behaving as such, deserves her attention, despite her disgust for the aristocracy. In other words, Darcy conquers her heart by showing her he merits it. Her realising she loves him is necessarily a product of the discovery of his merits as a gentleman and not simply of his ten thousand a year and the beautiful grounds of Pemberley.

Peculiarly enough, the discussion moves in a circle and returns to societal issues. The most important changes in Elizabeth’s behaviour concern her point of view about social rank and, as revolutionary as she can be, when she marries, some theorists argue, she conforms to tradition, not only because of matrimony, but because it is a considerably advantageous union. It is a fact that even if, along with that, she learns to love her future spouse, nevertheless there is a sign of tradition established here. A way of putting it may be that the fictional world emulates Austen’s desire concerning her world. As her family is a Tory, defender of social institutions such as the Church of England, the Navy and a hierarchical organization of society, marriage is only natural to happen, and as the Anglican priest Michael Giffin quoted by Miles observes: “in Anglican theology there is a crucial overlap between the notion of a household, parish and wider community (implicating at its widest, the nation)” (2013, p. 17). Then, a woman “redeems and renews the community” through marriage (GIFFIN, 2013, p. 17). Elizabeth is so expressive and representative of human relationships because she is an individual creature, expresses her own mind, and, although she marries – which would represent her conforming to tradition – she only does so to a man she can love and respect. Therefore, in building her beloved and most famous heroine, Austen builds a representation of the movements in thought under course in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England. This means that traditional and revolutionary ideas find a room in the life of her characters.

4 THE LIZZIE BENNET DIARIES: WOMEN’S ROLES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Moving the setting from Regency England to twenty-first century California-USA is likely to bring some changes in the composition of a character. Added to that is the fact that the plotline was adapted from novel to a video blog, which is a fairly new endeavour originated in the entertainment business. It is a transmedia project which spreads through video blogs, social network profiles and printed diaries. Lizzy Bennet, the protagonist of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, as she herself declares in the first episode, “is a 24 year-old grad student with a mountain of student loans, living at home and preparing for a career” (GREEN, SU, 2012-2013). At the beginning, the viewer may think the series will be only about the romantic dramas of a young woman and her sisters as the protagonist uses most of her time in the vlog entries discussing Jane

Bennet and Bing Lee's relationship, or the lack of one. As the episodes unfold, though, the characters of Lydia Bennet and Charlotte Lu gain more visibility and the marriage theme shares space with the conflicts of sisterhood and friendship.

The first episode³ sets the tone of most of Lizzie's behaviour and thoughts, not only concerning social class, but her family, especially her mother and Lydia. In the novel, the reader learns Elizabeth's opinions concerning her mother and younger sister along the narrative. With the aid of visuals, the spectator is able to understand Lizzie's point of view about them already in the first episode, especially if one has read the novel before. Such visuals concern, of course, gestures, like shaking her head, as well as facial expressions showing disapproval of Lydia's behaviour and establishing the protagonist's perception of her sister's foolishness. It is noticeable that the perception is enhanced by the performance of the actress who plays Lydia, as she emphasises that the rich young man who has just moved to Netherfield is also single.

Concerning her mother, Lizzie uses a technique she drew from her media studies classes, which is costume theatre. It consists of using clothes that remind the audience of a character and play the role of that character in a dialogue which would elucidate past events to the audience. Up until the middle of the videos, Lizzie uses such resource to mock on her mother's perspectives of life, which include a desperate desire to see her daughters well-married. While she mocks her parent, the spectator is able to grasp what her judgment of marriage really is: unlike her mother, she does not consider it the most important event in her or her sisters' lives. For this young woman, having a master's degree and afterwards finding a job which will help her make the world a better place are the important circumstances in life. Added to that is the fact that she still lives with her parents and accumulates a considerable amount of debts due to her studies.

Still in the same video, Lizzie explains the type of family she belongs to: "2.5 WPF", that is, a middle class family with 2.5 kids, according to statistics, who has a house surrounded by a white picket fence. Later, in the second and third episodes, the viewer learns that her family is going through financial trouble: her older sister, Jane has a low-paid job in the fashion design field; Lizzie herself needs to finish her master's and find an employment; the third sister, Lydia, goes to community college; and their parents pay a mortgage for the house and may be considering a second one. Besides that, all of them live at home. As episodes unfold, the protagonist demonstrates her concerns in relation to the context previously mentioned, which modulate the situation of a great percentage of American families. The business market is every day more competitive and the family situation echoes the 2009 crisis the country went through (and from which it is still recuperating). In such an environment, Lizzie is a young woman of her time, a time in which women do not depend on marrying, but on studying and having a successful career to secure their future. Observing the way she is portrayed, one might argue that women are different, times have changed, but still they struggle to earn a life.

It is, then, about career choices that modern Lizzie and Charlotte, now Charlotte Lu, argue, as the former romantically wishes to change the world with her work, and the latter is focused on having a well-paid employment which will allow her to pay her debts and, at the same time, to be less of a burden at home. The point of disagreement emerges when Rick Collins, an old school classmate, who is in the media business and whose investor is Catherine de Bourgh, offers Lizzie a job position in their company,

³ Accessible at <https://www.youtube.com/user/LizzieBennet>

which she turns down because in her words it involves “corporate videos, bad reality TV and pointless commentary vlogs” (GREEN, SU, 2012-2013). Those are the terms Lizzie uses afterwards, when she tries to force Charlotte to desist from the same position Mr Collins has offered her. Unlike the novel, where Elizabeth is more composed and refrains from speaking her true mind on the subject, maybe due to decorum and also to social constraints imposed on women at that time, modern Lizzie makes a real drama out of the situation and they yell at each other, parting in not amiable terms. This is episode 42 and, by this point in the narrative, the viewer has already seen that Lizzie has definitely not many constraints to speaking her mind avidly. Again, although exponential differences in intensity, both the original and modern protagonists reveal their thoughts and nature from a biased point of view, unable to observe events from a different perspective.

It is from this biased position that Lizzie judges Darcy. She dedicates the entire episode six to describing how their first encounter was and why William Darcy is a snob, or in her words “Snobby Mr Douchey”, which is a considerably derogatory designation. Unlike the novel, in which the reader learns a considerable part of Lizzie’s opinions through the narrator, in the vlogs the spectators have the protagonist right across of them in the screen, stating opinions in a very expressive manner. In this sense, although eventually there are few episodes not led by Lizzie, the first person narration that happens when Lizzie is on camera intensifies the misjudgements which may lead the viewer to wrong conclusions. This provides the spectator with unexpected developments in the story, when they learn the facts through other points of view. Concerning Darcy, the development of events follow the original plotline in which they grow an unfriendly sentiment towards each other in the beginning and, little by little, as he observes Lizzie, he softens and falls in love with her, to declare his love and be rejected by an infuriated Lizzie. She, on her turn, reciprocates the dislike until she visits the Pemberley Digital, when she herself softens, although confused about what she is feeling and only realises she loves him after she finds out he was responsible for saving her sister Lydia’s reputation. Again, she must divide herself, analyse what has happened and, finally, re-evaluate her point of view.

It is in relation to her sister Lydia that the modern plot moves away from the original and brings Lizzie along as the key element in the change. In the original, although very shocked with Lydia and Wickham’s elopement which resulted in their marriage, the protagonist does not change her opinion about her sister. Throughout the novel, she believes Lydia is a foolish girl who is always prone to get involved in trouble and, her little sister’s behaviour appears to reinforce this way of thinking. Lizzie, the modern protagonist, considers Lydia the inconsequential youngest, that one “doomed to a life of drug addiction”, and she fails to see her as a young woman who has her own opinions and personality who is only trying to get her sister’s attention. Apparently, the protagonist tries to frame Lydia into her own perspective of how a girl should behave and tries to teach her that through self-help books. Lydia feels offended by that and a distance grows between them. Surrounded by people who seem to fail to see her as she is, the youngest Bennet falls into the love trap of George Wickham, and has a countdown for a sex tape leak into the internet. In a parallel with the original plot, it is William Darcy who saves her by buying the company responsible for leaking the tape. It is only after this is over that the sisters can finally make peace and are able to see each other the way they are.

It is evident that the lack of true communication between sisters, and family as a whole, creates an environment that prompts Lydia into a more extravagant, or “energetic” behavior, as Darcy would say, in an attempt to call their attention. When she barges in while Lizzie is filming, or when she starts her own videos and asks Lizzie to watch them, she is trying to get her sister’s attention. However, her older sister seems to be too busy taking care of her own judgments, and keeps thinking her baby sister is an uncontrollable force of nature. In the original it was the relationship between Lizzie and Jane that gained attention as they were not only closer in age, but also in mind; how the heroine interacted with her other sisters for some reason did not get the same attention in the novel. In the modern adaptation, it is from episodes eighty-five to eighty-nine, after Lizzie sees her sister’s life devastated, that she questions herself why she was not around more often, why she did not watch her sister’s videos so she would see that coming, and decides to be supportive of her younger sister. So, there is the division of self, the criticising of one’s position and the necessary change as she recognizes her faults and decides to be closer and more open to her younger sister.

It is relevant to observe both Jane and Lizzie worry about Lydia’s welfare, and not about family name or reputation. After the countdown for the video goes online and Lydia suffers tremendously, Lizzie regrets not having watched her little sister’s videos as she could have foreseen what was to come. This brings an important move away from the original when it comes to Lizzie’s prejudice because, originally, her witty judgment is only challenged when she sees Darcy’s behaviour; especially after she finds out he was the one saving her sister’s reputation. In the vlog, although the viewer sees the protagonist’s behaviour soothe while she spends time with Darcy at Pemberley Digital, she only actually changes behaviour concerning her judgment when she is faced with Lydia’s drama. The shock the sex tape leak provokes makes her realize the picture she painted of her little sister was inaccurate.

As well as the original, the portrait of Elizabeth Bennet’s family represents to a certain extent social aspects of the world around her. Besides the financial situation representing the United States economic moment, there are important aspects to be discussed concerning women and her position in society. Each of the women in the Bennet family emulates a different perspective which may remind the reader of Angela McRobbie’s discussion on feminism and post-feminism. Drawing from Judith Butler’s book *Antigone’s Claim* (2000), she affirms there is a “double entanglement” taking place in contemporary society, which is facing not feminism – which “already passed away”-, but post-feminism. She says “this comprises the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life” and, at the same time, “processes of liberalization in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations” (2009, p. 12). So, while Mrs Bennet still believes marriage is her daughter’s only and best opportunity in life; Jane focuses on her career but allows herself to get involved in a love relationship; Lydia is the sexual liberated girl who “enjoys herself in bars, pubs and restaurants” (GREEN, SU, 2012-2013); while Lizzie is the book worm who spends most of her time reading, writing and studying. According to her younger sister, she does not know how to dress, she does not seem to appreciate parties and flirtation as much as it is supposed to be expected from young woman. Lydia even has a list of things which explain why Lizzie is going to be “perpetually single”. Just as her predecessor in the novel, she is not the accomplished type of girl, or rather, she does not fit the traditional expectation of a young woman. At the same time, she seems to be the Bennet daughter who represents some feminist characteristics. She

criticises Jane for liking a man their mother forced them on and that she is “doing so much more with her life than prancing around like a trophy wife” (Episode 2), Lydia for being too open and ‘energetic’ and Charlotte for choosing a stable job position because she needs it and not because she desires it.

She seems to be the type of feminist who would scold any display of a woman’s body as an objectification. Lizzie reprehends her sister for drinking and having fun, and for what she considers exaggerated sexual liberation. Meanwhile, she seems to be focused on career success and refusing at all costs her mother’s mentioning of her finding a husband. She relegates her love life to a secondary instance, but is fully engaged with her sister’s love life. McRobbie sees feminism as something which puts constraints to some of women’s desires: while they sought independency and equality with man, they forgot what were inherently women’s feelings and desires, romance, love, gossip. In the end, Lizzie lets her guard down and admits she loves Darcy and allows herself to get involved in a romantic relationship, although she still prefers to follow her own career and not become an employee at Pemberley Digital, Darcy’s company. Nevertheless as much as she shows feminist traits of strength and girl power, she celebrates Jane’s femininity and she herself says she likes “rainy days, classic novels and any film starring Colin Firth” in a reference to the 1995 version of *Pride and Prejudice* and later on to *Bridget Jones’ Diary*. If, in the past feminism established an opposition to femininity, post-feminism seems to be the space to bring it back. In these terms you can be a successful woman who conquered your space in society in the employment market and, at the same time, be married, have children, be romantic, enjoy gossiping with friends, cry over a drama film (McRobbie, 2009, p. 13). Angela McRobbie also affirms that, if feminism was about the strength of the group and gaining space in society for women in general, post-feminism is about the individual female and her desires. In relation to that, she uses Bridget Jones as a reference: she has a job, is financially independent from her parents, but cries over a romantic movie, fears becoming a spinster, not having time to have children.

In the post-modern society – where post-feminism has risen, women have the possibility of individual choice, which for McRobbie (2009, p. 19) “is surely, within lifestyle culture, a modality of constraint. The individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices”. This is the type of pressure that the Bennet girls suffer, as well as Charlotte: having to make a choice in career, studies or in a relationship, and to make the right one. All of them go through ups and downs because of their choices and, after learning from improper decisions, they take the right direction. Everything ends well in the narrative, just like it does in the original: Jane and Bing Lee move to New York, where she will focus on her career, and they will work out their relationship; Lydia is in the process of psychological recovering after Wickham’s sex tape; and Lizzie finally learns that her pre-judgments of people were wrong and that she must know a person before forming a conception of them. Also, she engages in a romantic relationship with Darcy, but chooses not to work for him at his company and creates her own instead.

5 CONCLUSION

Both the original protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet, and the modern version, Lizzie Bennet, emulate women’s dilemmas in the twentieth and twenty-first century: gaining

space and voice in society, even if it is to marry for love and not convenience, being respected in the business market and being able to be feminine and express fragility, without being considered weak or not representative of feminism. Many theorists have asked “Why Austen?” Why now?”. Some might argue Janeites⁴ seek “a stable, recognizable world – [a] cultured world” (MARGOLIS, 2003, p. 22), because their own modern reality seems to be part of a chaotic system. Other theorists, like Camile Paglia, see neoconservative bells tolling. With the analysis of the protagonists of these two pieces of very successful reader/viewership I want to argue that the answer is that they speak to generations of women who have felt restrained, forced to be strong, to face all the challenges of everyday life and who, nevertheless, are still women, still enjoy romantic plots, rain and classic novels. The strong human relationships represented in the narratives of the lives of the protagonists echo post-modern women anxieties, if one considers McRobbie’s perspective. Furthermore, Sheenagh Pugh (2005) points out *Pride and Prejudice* leaves room for a lot of imagination as most characters are barely described in terms of physical appearance and many of them have uncertain futures ahead, so it leaves room for the imagination to work from both adapters and readers/viewers. At the same time, adaptations - such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* - as Robert Sales points out, “are relevant to the academic study of Austen since readers [and viewers] construct an idea of the author, and therefore of her works and her historical period” (SALES, 1996, p. 25). Therefore, they may contribute to the longevity of her work as new readers approach the novel after being acquainted with adaptations (PARRIL, 2002, p.8).

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⁴ Term coined by George Saintsbury in his introduction to the 1894 edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, which from that period on is used to refer to the fans of all things Austen.

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